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Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

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yarsk radar site and the development of the SS-25 ICBM, and growing tensions as the Cold War heightened.

The treaty would have provided for an initial overall limit of 2,400 strategic nuclear delivery vehicles for each nation and a limit of 1,300 multiple-independently-targetable-reentry vehicles (MIRV) carrying ballistic missiles. The protocol would have banned the deployment of air-to-surface ballistic missiles (ASBMs) and ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs and SLCMs) with ranges in excess of 600 kilometers, while the Joint Statement of Principles would have provided for subsequent SALT III negotiations.

Still, the SALT II accords were observed by both the USSR and the United States on a voluntary basis until May 1986, when President Ronald Reagan announced that the United States would no longer be bound by its ceilings. In the meantime, a new round of arms control negotiations had already been initiated by the Reagan administration in July 1982 under the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START I).

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SEE ALSO Strategic Arms Limitation Talks I; Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

Arms control talks (START I) between the USSR and the United States that replaced the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). These talks were carried out from June 1982 until July 1991, resulting in the Treaty Between the United States and the USSR on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.

These talks were initially conducted by the United States with the goal of reducing large numbers of Soviet multiple-independently-targetable-reentry-vehicled (MIRVed) intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), while at the same time keeping intact U.S. submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and air-launched-cruise-missiles-(ALCM)-based strategic forces. Soviet delegates countered these proposals with their own demands, which included a total ban on all long-range cruise missiles. These talks were broken off by the USSR in November 1983. They resumed only in March 1985, under the bilateral Nuclear and Space Talks forum, after an easing of tensions over U.S. basing of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and Pershing IIs in Western Europe. The START I Treaty was finally reached on July 31, 1991. The Russian Federation, Republic of Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan—four successor states of the former Soviet Union—became parties to this treaty with the signing of the Lisbon Protocol in May 1992.

In this treaty an agreed limit of 1,600 "deployed" strategic nuclear delivery vehicles (SNDVs) and 6,000 "accountable" warheads (that is, warheads on the SNDVs) was set. For these warheads, limits were set at 4,900 for deployed ICBMs/SLBMs, 1,100 for deployed mobile ICBMs, and 1,540 for deployed heavy ICBMs. Reductions to the agreed upon limits were to take place in three phases over the course of seven years. The treaty itself would be in force for fifteen years, at the end of which an option for extension exists.

The first phase of reductions took place no later than thirty-six months after treaty entry into force and witnessed a lowering of SNDVs to 2,100 and warheads to 9,150 (of which only 8,050 could be deployed on ICBMs/SLBMs). The second phase of reductions was slated to take effect no later than sixty months after the treaty's entry into force and would achieve a lowering of SNDVs to 1,900 and warheads to 7,950 (of which only 6,750 could be deployed on ICBMs/SLBMs). The third phase of reductions would take place no later than eighty-four months after the treaty's entry into force and represents the target numbers agreed upon in this accord. Separate agreements to this treaty limited SLCMs with ranges above 600 kilometers at 800 for each nation and limited Soviet Backfire bombers to 500.

Three major criticisms of the START I Treaty exist. First, it fails to take into account immense Soviet ICBM/SLBM reload capabilities (i.e., strategic SNDV reserves). Second, the lack of parity between Soviet and U.S. SNDVs was not given consideration. The Soviet ICBM force was far more lethal than its U.S. counterpart, yet both sides' ICBMs were counted equally. Last, the concept of "accountable" warheads deployed on SNDVs is flawed. Photoreconnaissance suggests that the Soviet SS-18 force, which represented most of the Soviet's ICBM throw weight, was capable of being outfitted with additional warheads per missile in violation of treaty terms.

Because of these criticisms, it has been argued that the START I Treaty allowed the Soviets to use the rubric of arms reductions to achieve strategic offensive force modernization while at the same time denying such an option to the United States. With the demise of the USSR and the signing in January 1993 of the START II agreement as yet unratified, many of these criticisms may be alleviated. The START II treaty eliminates all MIRV-equipped ICBMs and limits the overall number of warheads to 3,500 or fewer.

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Strategic Defense Initiative

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was a research and technology development program established by the United States in January 1984. The Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) was created in April 1984 to explore five research concepts relating to a defense against ballistic missiles. Two of these concepts were based primarily on forms of advanced nonnuclear weaponry, directed-energy weapons (DEW): lasers and particle beams, and kinetic energy weapons (KEW): electromagnetic and rail guns. The three other research concepts were surveillance, acquisition, tracking and kill assessment (SATKA), systems analysis and battle management (SA/BM), and survivability, lethality, and key technologies (SLKT).

The Reagan administration's primary rationale behind SDI was originally to protect the population of the United States and that of its allies by a "missile shield"; however, the emphasis shifted to one of deterrence and thereafter to lower Soviet capacity for preemptive strike capability against U.S. retaliatory forces.

The USSR did not respond to the SDI. Rather, the SDI was a response by the United States to the strategic missile defense program of the USSR. For years prior to the SDI, the Soviets had been actively creating and deploying strategic missile defenses, at times in violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Defenses for the Soviet capital, Moscow, represented the only fully operational ABM system deployed in the world.

Soviet doctrine and strategy emphasized strategic defense as a complement to the use of overwhelming offensive forces. The SDI directly challenged Moscow's preemptive strike capability and, as a result, placed its entire military strategy in jeopardy. Further, the SDI threatened to take the Cold War to a new threshold and place the USSR in a no-win situation. A ballistic missile defense race would place such an immense strain on the Soviet economic and political system that it would be unable to compete effectively against a technologically advanced West unless it adopted a market economy. The adoption of this type of economic system would discredit and ultimately undermine the ideology of the Soviet Communist regime.

In response, an intensive propaganda and disinformation campaign was directed against the SDI by the USSR. This well-coordinated campaign was conducted on a number of levels, including overt government arms control efforts, propaganda, and KGB-promoted active measures that focused on the SDI.

The SDI program was reoriented in 1991 under the Bush administration to defend against limited ballistic missile threats and became known as global protection against limited strikes (GPALS). This program in turn was reorganized under the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) by the Clinton administration. The BMDO focused on theater missile defense (TMD) and contained very modest strategic ballistic missile defense research.

The SDI was also known derogatorily as "star wars" because of the science fiction-like weaponry it would require. This type of weaponry, of which lasers are one example, is currently beginning to be deployed by U.S. ground forces.

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SEE ALSO Arms Control Treaties and Agreements